## CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Previously Presented) A method comprising:

selecting, by a user via a user-input device of a sender, a still image that includes a single array grid of pixels, wherein the still image is not part of an existing character set stored on the sender;

transforming, by a pixel array generator of the sender, the selected still image into a custom graphical emoticon;

obtaining a character sequence from the user via the user-input device of the sender, the character sequence including alphanumeric characters;

assigning, by a processor configured with executable instructions, the character sequence to the custom graphical emoticon, the character sequence representing the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the character sequence acts as a placeholder for the custom graphical emoticon;

obtaining a message from the user via the user-input device of the sender, the message including textual content with the emoticon-placeholding character sequence embedded therein;

transmitting the message from the sender to a destination via a message-transmission modality of transmission, the transmitted message including the textual content with the emoticon-placeholding character sequence embedded therein; and

separately from the transmitting of the message, sending the custom graphical emoticon to the destination via a different modality of transmission than the message-transmission modality of transmission.

2. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the obtaining of the character sequence limits the character sequence to have characters less than or equal to seven.

3. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the single array grid of the custom graphical emoticon comprises a pre-determined sized pixel array grid.

4. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the message-transmission modality of transmission includes text messaging.

5. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising parsing the character sequence into an object name for the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the object name includes a globally unique identifier of the custom graphical emoticon and a location of the custom graphical emoticon in an emoticon object store in the sender.

6. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

receiving a request from the destination for the custom graphical emoticon; and

in response to the request, performing the sending of the custom graphical emoticon to the destination.

7. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the custom graphical emoticon comprises a portable network graphics file.

8. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

parsing the character sequence into an identifier and a location of the custom graphical emoticon in an emoticon object store in the sender; and

storing the identifier and the location in a header of the message that includes the textual content with the emoticon-placeholding character sequence embedded therein.

9. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 8, wherein the identifier and the location comprise at least parts of an object name for the custom graphical emoticon.

10. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 9, wherein the object name is stored in the header of the message.

11. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the different modality of transmission of the sending uses at least one of an object store and an object transport mechanism.

12. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the message-transmission modality of transmission comprises instant messaging.

13. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the message-transmission modality of transmission is limited to the textual content only.

14.-22. (Canceled)

23. (Previously Presented) A custom emoticon engine having at least a physical component in a computing device, the custom emoticon engine comprising:

an image selector configured to create a custom graphical emoticon from a still image, wherein the custom graphical emoticon is representable as a single array grid of pixels;

a custom emoticon object store configured to store the custom graphical emoticon;

a character sequence assignor configured to associate a sequence of characters with the custom graphical emoticon, the sequence of characters being input by a user via a user-input device; and

a transmitter configured to send the character sequence embedded in a text message to a destination, wherein the array grid of pixels replaces the character sequence within the text message at the destination as both of the text message and the array grid of pixels are displayed on a screen.

24. (Previously Presented) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 23, further comprising a user interface wherein a first dialogue is deployed to define custom graphical emoticons and a second dialogue is deployed to create real-time messages to include character sequences associated with the custom graphical emoticons.

25. (Previously Presented) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 23, wherein the custom emoticon object store is further configured to transfer data of custom graphical emoticons separately from the text message that includes the character sequence.

26. (Previously Presented) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 23, further comprising a character sequence parser, wherein the character sequence is parsed into an object name usable as an emoticon identifier and an emoticon locator.

27. (Previously Presented) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, further comprising a header engine to store object names in a header of the text message.

28. (Original) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, wherein the custom emoticon engine uses an object store mechanism.

29. (Original) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, wherein the custom emoticon engine uses an object transport mechanism.

30. (Previously Presented) A computing device storage media containing instructions that are executable by a computer to perform actions comprising:

creating a custom graphical emoticon by selecting an image associated with the custom graphical emoticon by a sender;

representing the image as a single array grid of pixels for the custom graphical emoticon;

assigning a character sequence to the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the character sequence is assignable by the sender; and

transmitting a text message by the sender along with the character sequence to a destination to allow for reconstruction of the custom graphical emoticon at the destination, wherein the custom graphical emoticon is substituted within the text message for the character sequence within the text message, and both the text message and the custom graphical emoticon are to be received in the same dialog.

31. (Previously Presented) The computing device storage media as recited in claim 30, wherein the character sequence allows real-time mapping to the custom graphical emoticon.

32. (Previously Presented) The computing device storage media as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to parse the character sequence into an object

name for the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the object name includes an identifier of the custom graphical emoticon and a location of the custom graphical emoticon.

33. (Previously Presented) The computing device storage media as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to:

transmit the character sequence in a real-time first communication; and

transmit data representing the custom graphical emoticon in a second communication, wherein the data is used to reconstruct the custom graphical emoticon in place of the character sequence in the real-time first communication.

34. (Previously Presented) The computing device storage media as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to:

parse the character sequence into an identifier and a location of the custom graphical emoticon; and

store the identifier and the location in a header of the message that includes the character sequence.

35. (Previously Presented) The computing device storage media as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to retrieve the custom graphical emoticon.

36. (Previously Presented) The computing device storage media as recited in claim 35, further comprising instructions to retrieve the custom graphical emoticon using one of an object store mechanism and an object transport mechanism.

37. (Currently Amended) A method for facilitating communication using custom emoticons, the method comprising:

creating, by a pixel array generator, an emoticon pixel set by a sender by selecting a single set of pixels, which is a custom emoticon;

storing the emoticon pixel set in a custom emoticon object store of the sender;

transferring the emoticon pixel set to a destination from the custom emoticon object store of the sender, wherein the transferring comprises establishing a real-time peer-to-peer link between the sender and the destination to retrieve the emoticon pixel set from the custom emoticon object store of the sender;

sending instructions to the destination on how to retrieve the emoticon pixel set;

mapping the character sequence to the emoticon pixel set using a keyboard device;

parsing the character sequence into an object name for the pixel emoticon set, wherein the object name includes both an identifier and a location of the pixel emoticon set;

storing the identifier and the location in a header of a text message; and

transmitting, to the destination, the text message by a sender, the text message including the character sequence, which was mapped to the pixel emoticon set, the destination being configured to identify and locate the transferred emoticon pixel set at

the destination using the identifier and the location transmitted in the header of the text message, wherein both the text message and the emoticon pixel set are displayed on a screen of the destination, the emoticon pixel set being substituted at the destination within the text message for the character sequence mapped to the emoticon pixel set within the text message, the emoticon pixel set being transferred from the sender to the destination separately from the transmission of the text message from the sender to the destination.

38. (Currently Amended) A method for facilitating communication using custom emoticons, the method comprising:

receiving a communication by a message receiver, wherein the communication comprises:

a text message, the text message including a custom-emoticon-mapped character sequence, which is mapped to a custom emoticon pixel set, which is defined as a set of pixels residing outside the communication; and

a header storing at least one of an identifier and a location of the custom emoticon pixel set, the identifier and the location comprising at least part of an object name for the custom emoticon pixel set;

determining whether the custom emoticon pixel set is stored in a local storage medium of the message receiver, wherein the determining utilizes the identifier and the location;

in response to the determining, retrieving the custom emoticon pixel set from the local storage medium of the message receiver;

otherwise, retrieving the custom emoticon pixel set from a storage medium associated with the sender of the communication or with a server, in which the communication did not originate; and

displaying the text message in a screen, the custom emoticon pixel set being displayed in the text message instead of and in place of the custom-emoticon-mapped character sequence in the text message.